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Feminism and men: Ambivalent space for acting up

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Abstract

Feminism, historically and today, provides challenges and opportunities to men. In this essay, we present a dialogue that highlights different positions on men's activism and thought in relation to feminism. We argue that it is essential for men to engage with feminism as activists and in theory, although this may present risks subjectively, professionally, and interpersonally. To illustrate our argument, we provide examples of engagement and distance from our working lives in different socio-cultural contexts. We explore questions of vulnerability and uncertainty in learning from feminism, and discuss how our privileges as (white, middle-aged, permanently employed) men condition our ambivalent experiences. The essay is oriented towards encouraging ourselves/men to articulate what feminism in action means, through research, teaching, and professional identity work. We consider throughout the conditions of possibility for men in acting up with feminism in critical organization and management studies, in the hope that practical action can create better conditions of work for all of us.

Keywords

Feminism, men, masculinity, theory, activism, reflexivity, patriarchy

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Introduction

This is a dialogue about feminism, between two men. It is a way of thinking through feminism as theory, practice, and praxis, being gendered as man, and masculinity. We emphasize the potentials and pragmatics of men engaging with feminism, in being and in action, to challenge unjust and unethical gendered structures or cultures of discrimination, domination, and exclusion. There are particular risks in this: it may be read as reinforcing 'between men cultures' of structured exclusion that have engendered and maintained patriarchy for so long (Irigaray, 2007). Perhaps feminism is 'a subject for women who are, precisely, its subjects, the people who make it; it is their affair' (Heath, 1984: 8-9). However, we believe that '[f]eminism is also a subject for me [as a man]. … Feminism speaks to me, not principally nor equally but *too*' (ibid). We try here to understand how feminism speaks to us, and how it provokes action in our work and working lives. The text is personal, perspectival, and political; it deals with intellectual and material challenges; and it speaks to the emotions of engaging with feminist research and politics from within a male gendered body and the masculinities that such embodiment suggest.

We especially want to highlight the fragility and ambivalence of men's engagement with feminism, analysing our experiences, which are based on different praxis commitments and ideas about men's relations to feminism as an intellectual and activist movement for emancipatory social change. The first position, embodied by Scott in the UK, advocates and supports feminism as an intellectual and political project, but is sceptical about men adopting the term feminist as an identity marker. The second position, endorsed by Janne in Finland, approaches feminism as an inclusive movement and body of knowledge that is available for men as well as women, and treats feminism as an important source of social identity for men too. We are not trying to reconcile these two positions, or produce a winner and a loser. Instead, we suggest that living with uncertainty and discomfort ought to characterise men's relationship with feminism, and that a lack of argumentative closure is generative.

In what follows, then, we address the inspirations and anxieties that characterize relationships between feminism and men dialogically (Jardine and Smith, 1987). Feminism is famously plural, ranging from those read as accepting and supporting neoliberal capitalism in practice (e.g. Sandberg, 2013), to those which propose radical economic restructuring based on detailed conceptual arguments (e.g. Gibson-Graham, 1996; 2006). We attempt to navigate some of these pluralisms, always with the intention of enabling action. We account for the politics in, and costs of, men's engagement with feminism, and consider how such costs may differ from those

experienced by women. Finally, we discuss the conditions of possibility for men in 'acting up' to or with feminism to further its practical and theoretical purposes.

Scott: Being a man, practising feminism

Being asked 'are you a feminist?' feels like an exam question, an uncomfortable one that I'm destined to fail on with my response. I was born in the UK, I live and work here, and I'm not a feminist. I would like, however, to be active for feminism. For me this is a simple decision: I understand and experience sexist oppression as a bad thing for everyone, and feminism offers the best set of arguments and practices available to dismantle it. In this, I like to follow bell hooks' (1984) encouragement to avoid saying 'I am a feminist' as a personal identity and self-definition, and to say 'I advocate feminism' as an open political and personal position. It feels better, and I think it's also more reasonable for someone in the kind of body I'm in. It also helps to avoid seeing feminism just as 'an approach, a handy object' (Heath, 1987: 43), an addition to the theoretical options available to us. Like Stephen Heath, I understand feminism as a way of being and seeing that involves a radical shift in work and life that demands a new grammar and vocabulary – but also new intonations and syntaxes, which I'm not sure I can ever be comfortable in using.

In my workplace, I have opportunities to speak – it's relatively democratic compared with many other workplaces, and relatively open to progressive projects like feminism. I can act like a feminist in the sense that they try 'to understand and dismantle gender hierarchies in their intellectual as well as personal worlds' (Wolf, 1992). This is quite basic – we know a lot about how women are systematically disadvantaged, excluded, marginalised, and undervalued in academic organizations (see e.g. Fotaki, 2013; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2013). Publishing, teaching, institutional work, and building reputation are all made more difficult for women, by men or by abstracts like culture, structure, or masculinities. Evidence and analysis suggests some straightforward ways to 'understand and dismantle' this sex-based inequality: first, acknowledge that it exists and is real; second, practice differently – all of us.

But intellectually, I think the relationship between feminism and men is more complex. There are obvious barriers to practising some feminist methodologies that are based on embodied or 'carnal' experience (Wacquant, 2004), and there are obvious intellectual dangers if we engage with feminism as a way of commentating on something else, something ostensibly more significant (Jardine, 1987), such as political economy. Male Marxist theorists seem to be

especially prone to this 'politics of inclusion [that] can also turn into an appropriative gesture' (Spivak, 1982: 276). As Elaine Showalter (1987: 120) memorably asks, 'Is male feminism a form of critical cross-dressing, a fashion risk… that is both radical chic and power play?'. For some (male) colleagues within our discipline it is just and exactly that (Ashcraft, 2016).

So I'm continually asking myself if feminism is a justifiable position and risk, in part because of the 'complex, contradictory social inscription of feminist theory' (Nelson, 1987: 155). I have presented analysis of why women leave professions at conferences, provoking questions like 'why are you researching women's experiences of work?'. I've never really had a convincing answer – I always come back to 'because they're/you're interesting and I'd like to understand more about women's experiences of work and organization'. This is, I know, inadequate. But I also know that I want to do something to contribute towards addressing what Rose (2015) calls the 'charge sheet of injustice' that men must take responsibility for in relation to women. I think I can do that by practising a kind of feminism, mainly in my own organizational or professional work, including teaching, but perhaps also by making feminism an aspect of what I do in research. This decentres my sense of self as simple, unproblematic, and secure – I have to ask what it is to research and teach as a man, within masculinities and patriarchies. I will, as Braidotti (1987: 235) suggests, accept being the 'empirical referent' of feminism, and account for my part of our current situation. But I don't want a t-shirt.

Janne: Feminism is for everybody

I grew up in the Nordic tradition where gender equality is generally considered important and where progress is measured in terms of challenging structures of male domination in society through means of legislation and policy. This is one collective way for men to claim responsibility for asymmetric power relations and past gains. 'State feminism' in Nordic countries has changed cultural conventions and established assumptions about women's career making and men's care responsibilities (Bergqvist et al, 2007). The state offers support – for example, in the form of a public day care system – for rethinking motherhood and fatherhood beyond the rigid male breadwinner model that prevails in so many other societies (Egeberg Holmgren & Hearn, 2009). It is only after a long struggle by women (and men) that gender equality has acquired its status as something that both women and men can embrace.

But I am also intrigued by other times and places. One of the texts that has inspired me is *Feminism Is For Everybody*, also by bell hooks (2000). hooks is clear that feminism is a movement

to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression. It is not about being anti-male, but anti-patriarchy. And men can be (and do) that, too. As an African-American working class woman who discovered feminism in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement in the USA, hooks places class and race prominently on the feminist agenda. Because of different class- and race-related realities in people's lives, feminism can never be just one thing, with a single overarching narrative – there is no universal female experience in that sense. Equally, men are not to be excluded from the feminist movement by virtue of being men. hooks argues that visionary feminists have always understood the necessity of converting men. She says that without men as allies in struggle, the feminist movement does not progress

I have been told that feminist theorizing is about asking fundamental questions and seeking change in gender relations and societal institutions. However, this implies a wide and complex range of theories and perspectives (Calás and Smircich, 2006). Perhaps most important, feminist theories show me why I must account for my position, choices, and knowledge claims. And I can never do that alone. For a long time now, I have not researched women without women. I have studied women (and men) with women (and men). I think this is significant. Doing research drawing on feminist theory is an ongoing and joint discussion. For me, feminism is a life-long journey. It has become part of who I am.

So from these positions I think that men can see themselves as feminists. This entails awareness of the way men as a social category dominate within structures and relations of patriarchy, as well as the situated and embodied constructions of feminist positions by men in local contexts. As Jeff Hearn (2014) suggests, we must take the problems with the hegemony of men seriously, but we should not take ourselves as men too seriously. Hearn also argues that there is always a 'gap' between feminism and men. Maybe the issue is that men can never claim to have experienced sexism and sexist oppression, so their relation to feminism will always be different from women's. Yet I still don't see why that would mean that we cannot be feminists. I know others will disagree. For a man to pass as feminist remains a complicated question, and writing this makes me feel more than a little insecure.

Scott: Spaces, times and badges

The cultural norms that I grew up with about how men and women should behave, the jobs we/they should do, the educational opportunities that are appropriate – I understand now that they are a manifestation of sexism, and sexist oppression, and an interlinked series of attempts to

maintain the hegemony of men (Hearn, 2004). Feminism is also integral to challenging that for me and in this context. In teaching, for example, I can include acknowledgement of what Karen Ashcraft notes about the bureaucratic structures that most of us work within: that they can be understood as a 'structural expression of male dominance' (2001: 1301). I can push undergraduates to think about understanding the lack of women in formal positions of leadership through varieties of feminist analysis. If I see or hear sexism being practiced in meetings or during academic selection processes, I can say 'that's sexist' and try to shift discussion. I can collect data about women's experiences of work and management, and engage with feminism in analysis.

But why would I want to call myself (a) feminist? It's an epistemology, a subjectivity, a way of seeing, and an identity that I like and have respect for, but don't want to adopt it as a personal descriptor. I feel ontologically secure as a man, but I want to disrupt the behaviours I associate with the uglier aspects of masculinities, such as anti-feminist, sexist, or misogynist acts, for personal and political reasons. As Valerie Fournier and Warren Smith (2016) argue, accepting dualism in social practice may be an important step to generating political change in gender relations. As far as feminism is concerned, I want to continue to see it as the preserve of women or non-binary people, as an identity marker. If you want a label, perhaps I can *be* a strategic non-feminist, and *practice* pro-feminism.

Like you, I'm not even very happy writing about this. I can intellectualise the discomfort through a quote from an impressive source, maybe:

> It must be very uncomfortable to be a male, white, middle-class intellectual at a time when so many minorities and oppressed groups are speaking up for themselves; at a time when the hegemony of the white knowing subject is crumbling. Lacking the historical experience of oppression on the basis of sex, they paradoxically lack a minus. Lacking the lack, they cannot participate in the great ferment of ideas that is shaking up Western culture: it must be very painful indeed to have no option other than being the empirical referent of the historical oppressor of women, and being asked to account for his atrocities. (Braidotti, 1987: 235)

Or, still feeling defensive and vulnerable, with more from another imposing theorist:

> Why is it that male critics in search of a cause find in feminist criticism their best hope? Perhaps because, unlike the race and class situations, where academic people are not likely to get much of a hearing, the women's struggle is one they can support 'from the

> inside'. Feminism in its academic inceptions is accessible and subject to correction by authoritative men; whereas, as Clark has rightly pointed out, for the bourgeois intellectual to look to join other politico-economic struggles is to toe the line between hubris and bathos. (Spivak, 1982: 278)

Perhaps ironically, thinking this through by reading, talking and writing brings me to the point where I feel that my/men's relationship with feminism is simultaneously impossibly problematic, dangerous, and very necessary. But I guess I can live with that – there are worse things.

Janne: The position from which I speak

There are risks and costs involved in engaging with feminism, in addition to the opportunities, for sure. The position from which I speak seems quite straightforward at first. As a white middle-aged man, I carry unearned privileges. However, the way privileges play out is complex and ambivalent. The ambivalence is related to my choices, but these choices take place in, and draw meaning from, established gender relations and structures of domination in society and academia. The sense of vulnerability that surfaces in this dialogue only becomes understandable in this light. For a man to engage with feminism comes with a cost, but this cost is a relative one.

While we render ourselves vulnerable in this writing, vulnerability also operates on a more fundamental level. All those who do gender studies and engage with feminism become vulnerable. We are seen to question something that many hold dear, whether it is meritocracy or male dominance. However, the vulnerability of men is different from that of women (Katila & Meriläinen, 1999; 2002). In speaking out, women are typically accused of bias, bitterness or hysteria (Morley, 1994) and their views and actions trigger emotional and sometimes quite brutal reactions (Wahl et al, 2008). Many avoid displaying vulnerability at work altogether (Gill, 2009). When men speak out in the name of gender equality and feminism, the question of privilege and vulnerability reveals its complexity.

In doing gender studies research – and in claiming to be a feminist man – I have marginalized myself vis-à-vis the mainstream of organization and management studies. Some of my male (and female) colleagues seem to think that my research is not interesting and, more importantly, that it is not serious research. Because it is difficult to publish feminist research in highly regarded journals, insisting on such work makes others believe that I lack ambition. My commitment to gender studies and feminist theory is seen as a strange 'career choice' – because that is how it is often perceived: being 'willingly' marginalized rather than fulfilling one's full potential. This

perception rests on an institutionalized order where gender studies researchers are primarily located in their (our) own separate spaces: conference tracks, seminars and journals that time and again fail to become part of the mainstream (Tienari, 2014). A marginal and arguably ghettoized field of gender studies has emerged (and is constantly reproduced), and it is decoupled from the 'serious' mainstream. The professional respect earned there cannot be readily transferred to other spaces and areas of research (cf. Turco, 2012).

This artificial distinction between smart and not-so-smart career choices is perpetuated by hyper-competitive and individualistic academic practices that draw from a form of hegemonic masculinity. The ambitious academic flies around the world to network with like-minded colleagues (Parker & Weik, 2014), plays the game of publishing in the right journals (Macdonald & Kam, 2007), and makes sure that he boasts about his performance *and* his high ambitions to publish more (Billig, 2013; Lund, 2015). This form of highly competitive masculinity sets the criteria against which merit and potential are measured (Gill, 2009). I've now realised that my display of choosing differently – as a man – can be a threat to the masculinist hegemony. I somehow embody the inherent but hidden insecurity in competitive masculinity. In engaging with feminism, it seems, I defy the logic of competition.

Yet, I'm not really marginalized either. Early on in my academic life I developed a double strategy that is a combination of engaging with the mainstream (Grey, 2007) *and* following my ideals in doing something that feels important and right (Tienari et al, 2010). It became a way for me to negotiate demands for so-called excellence while attempting to maintain a critical ethos (cf. Butler & Spoelstra, 2012). A sleight of hand, perhaps, but as academics we are used to incorporating seemingly contradictory statements into our narratives (Clarke et al, 2012). Here I tell what Butler and Spoelstra (2012: 898) call a 'noble narrative'. I justify my motivation for publishing in highly ranked journals through the autonomy it helps me gain to pursue more critical interests. As Butler and Spoelstra's study shows, many (male) critical management scholars do the same.

This has resulted in some conformist and even boring publications. It is the instrumental value that these publications yield in my home university that I find crucial. Publications in specific journals count in assessment exercises, and I have used them as a leverage to create a position locally where I can argue for gender studies inclusion in curricula, and to make a case that PhD students and post-docs are supported in doing feminist research. The catch is that in developing

this position I have reproduced the hegemonic practices that I detest; practices through which publishing in the right journals is elevated to the centre of academic work. Female feminists, too, have noted this dilemma. In order to be able to change things locally, one ends up compromising some of one's ideals (Katila & Meriläinen, 1999). However, women who speak out and act up do this under a constant fear of recrimination. I, in contrast, can rely on my male confidence afforded by the gendered and ethnicised system. These differences notwithstanding, we do seem to share the experience of ambivalence in questioning the status quo (Katila & Meriläinen, 2002).

Scott: Talking about masculinities

There's an unamusing irony here, I think, that I imagine is easy to see. We're sitting in front of keyboards, talking through machines, discussing the most significant social movement of our lifetimes that has the purpose of challenging the structures and cultures that men have developed to exclude women, and we're focusing on what it's like to be a man. When men start to talk about feminism, especially among themselves, usually without being invited, in a discussion or debate like this, I think it can go off in strange directions. We can end up asserting a prerogative to speak in the pursuit of 'a puzzled sense of… individuality' (Morris, 1987: 174), practising a 'phallic 'feminist' criticism that competes with women instead of breaking out of patriarchal bounds' (Showalter, 1987: 127). This is especially the case within the critical community (Ashcraft, 2016), where:

> The move to feminist criticism on the part of other male theorists, in fact, seems motivated in many cases by the recognition that it offers the mixture of theoretical sophistication with the sort of effective political engagement that they have been calling for in their own critical spheres. (Showalter, 1987: 117)

But of course, as you're saying, there are different positions and a continuum of involvement. First, I think easiest, is the position I spoke about at the start – as a pro-feminist, acting in support of feminism, feminists, and women. Second, I think there's a position that Margery Wolf (1992) would recognise and perhaps approve of – being engaged as an activist and contributing intellectually, perhaps conducting feminist analysis or teaching with feminist perspectives. Then there's a third stop on the line, which is the one I feel uncomfortable with – *being* feminist, self-identifying as feminist or accepting others' definition as yourself as feminist.

That doesn't mean it's wrong or illegitimate, but it does mean I have to think really carefully about it and work through what the implications are, especially for 'non-men' – thinking as educators, as researchers, as people, but above all, as men. We can't ever forget that we

participate in and benefit from automatic inclusion in the hegemony of men (Hearn, 2004), and that a key task is to make use of that to promote what Hearn calls 'critical studies of masculinity'. Those studies don't have to be done by men (Ruth Simpson and colleagues' (e.g. 2014) work here is exemplary). But until we're clear about our belonging to *the* hegemonic social category and how our practices contribute to that (Hearn, 2004), then I think we should be very cautious about claiming to be feminist.

Janne: Experiencing ambivalence

Our male bodies are inscribed by others with certain qualities and potentialities (or lack thereof), and we are seen as cultural and symbolic carriers of white male privilege (Styhre & Tienari, 2013). On a personal level, this is rather frustrating. I have learned that any double strategy is risky with regard to the mainstream as well as the feminist community. People on both sides seem to look at my work – and me – with suspicion, albeit in different ways.

In the eyes of mainstream scholars I lack the *cojones* to play the masculinist game where stakes are raised and ever more ambitious publications are in the pipeline. And engaging with feminist scholars has at times been a schizophrenic experience. While receiving encouragement from many people, I have also sensed suspicion from the beginning, that is, since I first shared my intention of writing a PhD on gender and management. My closest feminist colleagues – women who have become my friends – tell me that for the first ten years they did not believe that I was sincere in what I was doing. From the beginning, these women were extremely conscious of my special position in the local context, the department where we worked. And where men's interest in gender studies was encouraged (Katila & Meriläinen, 1999). My feminist colleagues-cum-friends continued to see me through my privilege and alleged opportunism. Developing the double strategy did not help, of course. As a man who claims to be a feminist, but who does not *only* do feminist research, I remained in a liminal space.

I enact this liminal space in my university and in travelling abroad to conferences and workshops. There are those awkward moments when my identification with feminism is put to test; when I am suddenly excluded by female feminists because I am a man and cannot share the experiences of sexist oppression that are being discussed. Then again, there are those moments when I feel a strong sense of belonging to the feminist community. A recent feminist conference track took place in a hotel bedroom that had been hastily converted into a conference room. The miniscule room was jam-packed and buzzing with energy (although it quickly became evident

that we don't all look at feminism in the same way). Once again, I realized that I want to be with these people who care about what they do and who are prepared to stand up for it. There is this fearless and embodied joy (Bell & Sinclair, 2014) that surfaces in those joint experiences that I love. Yet, a sense of ambivalence comes back when I engage with some feminist texts. There are texts that make me uneasy, for example, when the whole of feminism is reserved for the struggle of a specific group. But there are many more texts that make me excited, texts that resonate with my thinking on what is wrong with the world, and how we can make it right. Overall, my engagement with feminism is an emotional and identity-related roller-coaster ride. But I have learned to accept it as such.

Today, as a professor in a well-regarded business school I shouldn't be talking about vulnerability. I feel free to do what I believe in – and in the local context I am tolerated and sometimes even rewarded for doing so. Not many female gender studies scholars – let alone feminists – have made it to professor in our field. For women, specializing in gender studies tends to be considered too marginal or, to put it more obscurely, 'too focused' (this is a comment a female colleague received when she applied for a professorship). In recruitment processes and performance appraisals a track record in this area is more often than not ignored as a signifier of merit. It has to be explained and justified – and then may still be overlooked (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2013). My double strategy has in some ways worked, but it has come with a cost. When I claim to be a feminist, it comes with a lot of baggage – and I realize this and think about it all the time. This is the experience of ambivalence that I wanted to share. I know I am not a very good revolutionary, but I still feel that I'm acting up, as a feminist.

Scott: Silence?

I honestly don't know what else to say – I'm not sure I have anything more to write here. Perhaps the best thing to do is 'fall off into silence' (Heath, 1987: 30), to contemplate what I experience as difference, contradiction, and impossibility in relation to being a male feminist, the barriers to practising 'femmeninism' (Kamuf, 1987). For a short time – because I think there's more purpose, more meaning, in supporting changes women decide to make to dismantle everyday sexist oppression. I'll live with the separateness, and think about what it means to be a man and think about what feminism is, ethically, politically, and actively (Heath, 1987).

Janne: On writing sincerely

This dialogue and Scott's last comments make me think about academic writing and its conventions and limits. Our dialogue shows how difficult it is to articulate what you want to say when you cannot hide behind the façade of totalizing conceptual language (Billig, 2013). I would like to think that we are writing sincerely, not just drafting a testament to male vanity. We are writing from (white, middle-aged, permanently employed) male bodies, as men, but we are writing in particular (and, it is now apparent, quite different) ways, sharing our hopes and doubts. We are sharing our emotions – our desires and intimacies and mysteries – something that is not only considered to be feminine but associated with women (Vachhani, 2015). Embodied writing is made extremely difficult by the conventions of academic writing and publishing today.

Mary Phillips, Alison Pullen and Carl Rhodes (2014) claim that by writing differently, we can shape the world anew. They talk about feminine writing in the face of the normalcy of masculine notions of rigor, hardness, and penetrating conclusiveness. They do add, however, that 'writing the feminine and the body invoke ways that women *and* men can explore and reclaim their bodies and their subjectivities' (p. 325, italics added). These colleagues envision writing as 'an embodied space where tension between pain and pleasure, body and mind, self and other' do something to the writer. What it does, no less, is help us 'overcome gender' (ibid.). Put more modestly, it encourages us to approach writing in a way that destabilizes gender dualisms in academia.

There is a strong counter-argument to writing differently, as one of the reviewers for this essay forcefully pointed out. Some consider it a path to self-marginalization, to reproducing the marginality of the field of gender studies and feminist research. It is possible to analyse sex discrimination or sexist exclusion in organizations from non-feminist but critical perspectives and to engage with the malestream journals and their conventions. This is one way to attempt to work for change, although there is plenty of evidence to suggest that the hegemony of the most prestigious journals is incredibly resistant to critical, let alone feminist work (Özkazanc-Pan, 2012). Also, many women do not associate with feminism and may find it awkward that men fuss about it. This perhaps reflects a rather individualistic take on the world, emphasising choice and self in what has been called 'postfeminism' (Gill et al, 2017; Lewis, 2014), or it is reluctance to take blame that claiming to be a feminist often results in. For all these reasons, writing differently and engaging with feminism is risky. Yet, I can't help feeling that, for me, and now, it's worth it. And I believe it is so for many others.

Our shared starting point in this dialogue, I think, was that we were both experiencing something unsettling. As (white, middle aged, structurally secure) men engaging with feminism we are constantly reminded about our bodies. This is unsettling because as that specific type of men we are not used to having to think (and to see) that our bodies condition our legitimacy as scholars. With this conversation, we have tried to come to terms with this. However, the anxiety has not gone away in these 'sticky moments' of reflexive self-realisation (Riach, 2009; Styhre & Tienari, 2013), so perhaps we learn to live and work with it.

Space for acting up?

There have been repeated demonstrations that feminism is often neglected in organization and management studies (Bell et al, 2019; Benschop & Verloo, 2016; Calás & Smircich, 2006). We have suggested here, perhaps counterintuitively, that addressing how men work with feminism can help understand what feminisms are, what they should and could be, and how they might be practised. The engagement of men with feminism will always be a contested issue, and some feminist women may object to any intrusion of men into what can be seen as their domain. We have tried here to respect the complexity in different positionalities and understand if some consider the involvement of men in feminist theory and activism hopelessly problematic. We will always speak from particular positions and carry certain privileges.

Notwithstanding we have argued here that there is merit in (re)starting conversation on different positions that men can enact in relation to feminism(s). Both positions presented in this essay are based on the conviction that sexism and sexist oppression are not a matter of or for individuals. One position can be read as actively supportive, the other more deliberately directly engaged and declarative. The positions can be read as differing in terms of the use of the label feminism. Yet there are also differences, more difficult to articulate, that we *feel* are important and distinctive for our different positions. We feel differences at work in many ways (Ashcraft, 2018): we are different from mainstream scholars and from female feminists, but we are also different from each other as men who engage with feminism. For Scott, feminism is one way among many of making things better, especially for women, in ways that men can actively support by challenging patriarchal structures of power *as men*. For Janne, it is a significant social movement and body of knowledge that can and should be inclusive of men in terms of identity. Adopting the label of feminist remains an area of disagreement, an open question, related to how we see ourselves as academics and as men. It is, to an extent, in the eye of the beholder: how others see us. That is

why it is impossible to provide a solution, a map that others can use, or a solid unchallengeable position, something that reviewers urged us to do (some more constructively than others).

So we conclude without an ending, by suggesting that particular positions become comprehensible in the light of the conditions that give rise to different experiences of being a (feminist) man, such as the societal and socio-cultural contexts where we live our lives, and that these positions *should* engender (pun intended) a degree of ambivalence. In this sense, we do not believe in a universal 'men's relationship with feminism'. There are many different ways to act up to it, and more important, plenty of things to act up about in this aspect of working life. Beyond our different positions, there are similarities in how we aim to do this. We try to respect feminist principles in editorial and reviewing work, being supportive of different voices and alternative ways of writing, and in how we produce knowledge with others, being mindful of whose work we build on, how we cite others' work, how we treat our research 'subjects', and how we ourselves write. We try to make a feminist difference in and through our teaching in terms of what we teach and how we teach, and when we work with doctoral researchers. We engage with everyday practices of recruitment and promotion in our universities, challenging dominant ways of evaluating and rewarding people's work, trying to intervene when we believe people are being mistreated. We seek to avoid performing an individualistic and aggressively competitive masculinity when we interact with others, we try to understand how we contribute to masculinist discourses, and we try to learn how we can work for change in our local communities and beyond. We try to do the same when we interact with managers and other practitioners.

Following Karen Ashcraft's (2018: 8) words and ideas, we try 'to promote a way of turning inward that simultaneously enhances our skill at turning outward'. We often fail, and good feminist colleagues let us know, so that we can try again differently or better. Such relationships and dialogue create an affective response of respect, even if from different positions, with different possibilities for action. We want here to raise the possibility that multiple voices can speak and be heard, and ethical openness can be practised where we do not close the other down. As such, it would be ironic, at best, if we presented an authoritative argument on men acting up in the promotion of feminism. After all, one of the central tenets and strengths of feminism, as we read it, is uncertainty in the production and presentation of knowledge (Snitow, 2015), so we finish here in appropriate uncertainty.

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